

Max Kaplan

Mordechai ben Simcha Tzvi HaKohen

Passed away August 25, 2003

27 Av 5763

Max Kaplan was a Kohen. He was descended from Aaron and the high priests of Israel who were responsible for the ritual service in the ancient Temple. A few years ago there was a research study that attempted to prove that there were common genes in men who claimed to be Kohanim.

Those of us who knew Max would not need any further proof that he was descended from a tribe who were given the honour and duty of ensuring that the commandments of God were fulfilled by the people. Max lived a life of devotion to his faith, to Israel, to his country, to his family and to his friends.

In this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, which deals with legal matters, we read how the people were told that if a case is too difficult for a local court to decide than the matter should be taken to a higher court which consists not only of judges, but also the High Priests or kohanim and the verdict that they decide must be obeyed.

Max carried the bearing of a person who people would respect and turn to for advice. Max made a personal impression on me early in my life. As a young child at Beth Shalom I remember him vividly with his dark hair and movie star looks. It's easy to see why the maitre d's at Hawaiian restaurants mistook him for Caesar Romero and gave him the best seats in the house. I left this city when I was quite young but when I moved back it was reassuring to see Max again, a little older and grayer but still maintaining the regal bearing of his ancestors.

Max took his Judaism seriously. As a Kohen he was entitled to be called first to the Torah and he took pride in reciting the prayers before and after the reading from the scrolls. He loved Yom Kippur. It may seem strange to say that his favourite holiday was one where we fast for 25 hours and ask God for forgiveness for our sins. But Max knew from reading the liturgy of Yom Kippur that it was at this time that the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies to pray for the people. Even though these practices have not been done this way since the destruction of the Temple I believe the readings from the Torah that reminded us of these customs, inspired Max to a life of service for the benefit of family, friends and everyone who came in to contact with him.

Whether it was in Beth Shalom or in a desert sandstorm in North Africa during the Second World War Max attended and participated in Yom Kippur services, hearing the haunting chant of the Kol Nidre and saying the Mourner's Kaddish at Yizkor in memory of his parents.

Max' dedication to this community through Beth Shalom, B'nai Brith and his work on behalf of Camp B'nai Brith has left a legacy that will not be forgotten. His success in the Real Estate industry and his recognition through his work for the Real Estate Board was a source of pride to all of us. He had a reputation for honesty and integrity that is remembered by everyone who did business with him. Despite this he remained a modest man who did not brag of his accomplishments or seek further honour. He preferred to spend as much time as he could with Rosalind, Sid and Mark, his extended family, his card buddies and his many friends in the community.

Tomorrow we begin the month of Elul, the final month before the Jewish New Year. Our tradition says that it was on the first of Elul Moses went up Mount Sinai for the second time to receive the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel blew the shofar, the ram's horn, to impress upon themselves that Moses had once again gone up the mountain, so they would not again make the tragic mistake in judging the time of Moshe's return, and fall into idol worship as they had with the golden calf.

Today we continue this custom of blowing the shofar each morning during the month of Elul to remind ourselves that the people of Israel had sinned in the desert, had repented and had been forgiven by God and restored to their former level of holiness. Through this our hearts and minds are reminded of the importance of doing 'Teshuvah' – repentance, and so the month of Elul prepares us for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Max's presence at synagogue and with his family and friends will be missed this Yom Kippur as the chazzan chants his favourite prayer, the Kol Nidre. At this time of sorrow it may be hard for his family to accept Max's rock solid faith in God and his belief that God answers prayers. We read in Proverbs that "The human spirit is the light of God". Within each of us, God implants a divine spark, Each of us has an obligation to tend this spark and fan it into a flame that will light up one's own life and the lives of others.

A lit candle can be snuffed out, or it can burn out, or it can kindle other candles. When the flame is passed on to others, the flame will continue to burn long after the original candle has been extinguished.

I believe there can be no greater way of showing our love and respect for Max by entering this approaching season with a resolve to ask forgiveness of not only God for any sins we may have committed against Him, but also to our loved ones and friends for any harsh words, thoughts or misdeeds that have harmed our relationship in the past.

Max was very careful in that throughout his 58 years of marriage to Rosalind he made sure they would never go to bed angry with each other. This past weekend he told her and his family that he was tired and could no longer fight the pain that ravaged his body. Max left this world satisfied with the knowledge that he left with no word unsaid, no thought unspoken, no expression of love still to be uttered. This is truly a life that can inspire us all. This is the beginning of the season where we can aspire to follow this example.

Tehi neeshmato tsroorah beetzror hachaim
May his soul be bound up in the bond of life